

2006 STUDY GUIDE

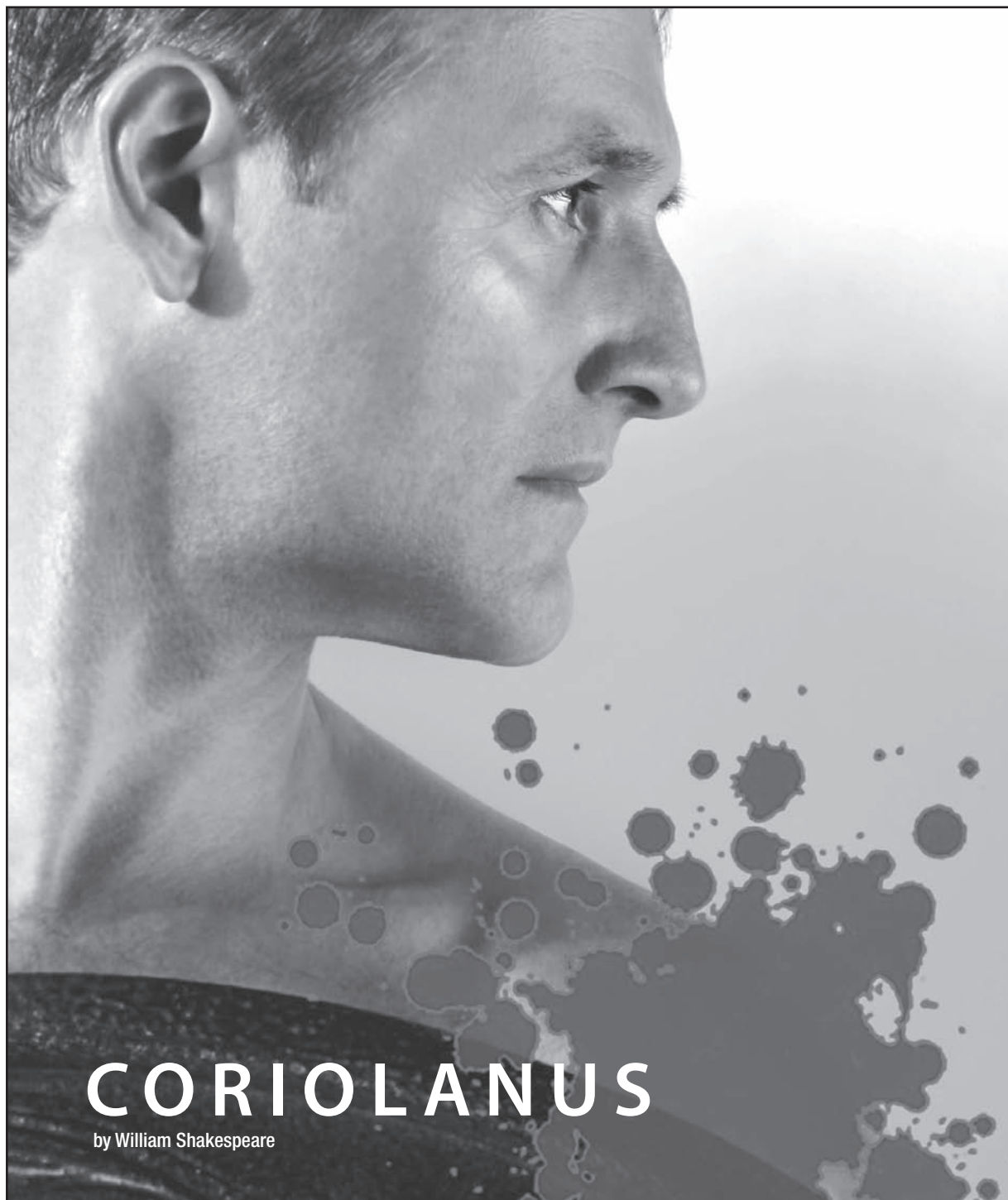
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CORIOLANUS

by William Shakespeare

Colm Feore


stratford
Festival of Canada
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR RICHARD MONETTE

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The Stratford Story

That Stratford, Ontario, is the home of the largest classical repertory theatre in North America is ultimately attributable to the dream of one man, Stratford-born journalist Tom Patterson.

In the early 1950s, seeing the economy of his home town endangered by the withdrawal of the railway industry that had sustained it for nearly 80 years, Patterson conceived the idea of a theatre festival devoted to the works of William Shakespeare. His vision won the support not only of Stratford City Council and an enthusiastic committee of citizens, but also of the legendary British actor and director Tyrone Guthrie, who agreed to become the proposed festival's first Artistic Director. The Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada was incorporated as a legal entity on October 31, 1952. A giant canvas tent was ordered from a firm in Chicago, and in the parklands by Stratford's Avon River work began on a concrete amphitheatre at the centre of which was to be a revolutionary thrust stage created to Guthrie's specifications by internationally renowned theatrical designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch.

From the balcony of that stage, on the night of July 13, 1953, actor Alec Guinness spoke the opening lines of *Richard III*: "Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this sun of York." Those words marked the triumphant end to what had sometimes seemed a hopeless struggle against the odds to turn Patterson's dream into a reality – and the beginning of an astonishing new chapter in Canadian theatre history. The other production of that inaugural six-week season, a modern-dress version of *All's Well That Ends Well*, opened the following night, confirming the opinion of celebrated novelist Robertson Davies that the new Festival was an achievement "of historic importance not only in Canada, but wherever theatre is taken seriously – that is to say, in every civilized country in the world."

Time proved the truth of Davies's words, for the Festival's pillared, porticoed thrust stage revolutionized the performance of classical and contemporary theatre in the latter half of the 20th century and inspired the design of more than a dozen other major venues around the world, including the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the Beaumont Theatre at Lincoln Centre and, in England, the Chichester Festival Theatre, the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield and the Olivier Theatre at the Royal National Theatre in London. Over the years, the Festival has made some amendments to the original design of Moiseiwitsch's stage, without changing its essential format.

At the end of the 1956 season, the giant canvas tent that had housed the Festival's first four seasons was dismantled for the last time to make way for a new and permanent facility to be erected around the existing stage. Designed by architect Robert Fairfield, the new building would be one of the most distinctive in the world of the performing arts: its circular floor plan and crenellated roof paying striking tribute to the Festival's origins under canvas.

In the years since its first season, the Stratford Festival of Canada has set benchmarks for the production not only of Shakespeare, Molière, the ancient Greeks and other great dramatists of the past, but also of such 20th-century masters



1953: The tent in which the first productions at the Stratford Festival were staged.



A view of the Festival Theatre as it stands today.

as Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, Anton Chekhov, Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. In addition to acclaimed productions of the best in operetta and musical theatre, it has also showcased—and in many cases premièred—works by outstanding Canadian and other contemporary playwrights.

Its artists have included the finest actors, directors and designers in Canada, as well as many from abroad. Among the internationally renowned performers who have graced its stages are Alan Bates, Brian Bedford, Douglas Campbell, Len Cariou, Brent Carver, Hume Cronyn, Colm Feore, Megan Follows, Lorne Greene, Paul Gross, Uta Hagen, Julie Harris, Martha Henry, William Hutt, James Mason, Eric McCormack, Loreena McKennitt, Richard Monette, John Neville, Nicholas Pennell, Christopher Plummer, Sarah Polley, Douglas Rain, Kate Reid, Jason Robards, Paul Scofield, William Shatner, Maggie Smith, Jessica Tandy, Peter Ustinov and Al Waxman.

Drawing audiences of more than 500,000 each year, the Festival season now runs from April to November, with productions being presented in four unique theatres, and includes a full program of Fringe activities including concert recitals, discussion sessions, lectures and readings by celebrated authors. It offers an extensive program of educational and enrichment activities for students, teachers and other patrons, and operates its own in-house school of professional artist development: The Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre Training.



1954: The interior of the tent in which productions were staged before the permanent facility was built



The Festival Theatre stage as it appears today.

ABOUT CORIOLANUS

The Playwright

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small Warwickshire town, in 1564, William Shakespeare was the eldest son of John Shakespeare, a glover, and Mary Arden, the daughter of a wealthy farmer. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but baptismal records point to it being the same as that of his death, April 23. He probably attended what is now the Edward VI Grammar School, where he would have studied Latin literature, and at 18, he married a farmer's daughter, Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, born in 1583, and, two years later, the twins Hamnet (who died in childhood) and Judith.

Nothing further is known of his life until 1592, when his earliest known play, the first part of *Henry VI*, became a hit in London, where Shakespeare was now working as an actor. Soon afterwards, an outbreak of the plague forced the temporary closure of the theatres, and Shakespeare turned for a while to writing poetry. By 1594, however, he was back in the theatre, acting with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He quickly established himself as one of London's most successful dramatists, with an income that enabled him, in 1597, to buy a mansion back in Stratford. In 1599 he became a shareholder in London's newly built Globe Theatre.

In 1603, Shakespeare's company was awarded a royal patent, becoming known as the King's Men. Possibly as early as 1610, the playwright retired to his home in Stratford-upon-Avon, living there – and continuing to invest in real estate – until his death on April 23, 1616. He is buried in the town's Holy Trinity Church.

In the first collected edition of his works in 1623, fellow dramatist Ben Jonson called him a man “not of an age, but for all time.” Not only did Shakespeare write some of the most popular plays of all time, but he was a very prolific writer, writing 38 (canonically accepted) works in 23 years. His work covered many subjects and styles, including comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances, all bearing his hallmark expansive plots, extraordinary language and humanist themes. Shakespeare enjoyed great popularity in his lifetime, and 400 years later, he is still the most produced playwright in the world.



A Shakespearean Timeline

1558	Elizabeth I crowned.
1564	William Shakespeare born.
1572	Actors not under the protection of a patron declared rogues and vagabonds.
1576	"The Theatre," the first public playhouse in London, opens.
1577	"The Curtain," London's second playhouse, opens.
1578	James VI (later James I of England) takes over government of Scotland.
1579	Publication of North's English translation of Plutarch's <i>Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans</i> .
1580	Francis Drake returns in triumph from his voyage around the world; travelling players perform at Stratford.
1582	Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway; Susanna is born six months later and the twins Hamnet and Judith in 1585.
1587	"The Rose" theatre opens in London. Mary Queen of Scots is executed.
1588	Spanish Armada defeated.
1589	Shakespeare finds work as an actor in London; he lives apart from his wife for 21 years.
1590-1591	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew.</i>
1591	<i>2 Henry VI, 3 Henry VI.</i>
1592	Thousands die of plague in London; theatres closed. <i>1 Henry VI, Titus Andronicus, Richard III.</i>
1593	<i>The Comedy of Errors.</i>
1594	Shakespeare becomes a shareholder of his theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men.
1594	<i>Love's Labour's Lost.</i>
1595	<i>Richard II, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream.</i>
1596	Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies.
1596-1597	<i>King John, The Merchant of Venice, 1 Henry IV.</i>
1597-1598	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor, 2 Henry IV, Much Ado About Nothing.</i>
1598	"The Globe" theatre built.
1598-1599	<i>Henry V, Julius Caesar.</i>
1599-1600	<i>As You Like It.</i>
1600-1601	<i>Hamlet, Twelfth Night.</i>
1601	Shakespeare's patron arrested for treason following the Essex rebellion; he is later pardoned.
1602	<i>Troilus and Cressida.</i>
1603	Queen Elizabeth dies and is succeeded by James I; Shakespeare's theatre company becomes the King's Men.
1603	<i>Measure for Measure, Othello.</i>
1604	Work begins on the King James bible.
1604-1605	<i>All's Well That Ends Well, Timon of Athens, King Lear (Q).</i>
1606	<i>Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra.</i>
1607	<i>Pericles, Prince of Tyre.</i>
1608	<i>Coriolanus.</i>
1609	<i>The Winter's Tale.</i>
1610	<i>King Lear (F), Cymbeline.</i>
1610	Shakespeare retires to Stratford-upon-Avon.
1611	<i>The Tempest.</i>
1611	King James version of the bible published.
1613	<i>Henry VIII (All is True), The Two Noble Kinsmen.</i>
1613	"The Globe" theatre burns down.
1616	Shakespeare dies in Stratford-upon-Avon.
1623	The First Folio of Shakespeare's collected plays is published.

*Some dates are approximate.

ABOUT CORIOLANUS

Sources and Production History

SOURCES AND ORIGINS

Shakespeare took the plot of *Coriolanus* from the Greek biographer Plutarch's *Lives*, written around 75 AD and translated into English by Sir Thomas North in 1595. Shakespeare appears to have drawn on other sources as well, including works by his contemporaries William Averell and William Camden.

The story of Coriolanus is also told by the Roman historian Livy (Titus Livius) in his massive work *Ab Urbe Condita Libri* – though in Livy's account Volumnia is the name of Coriolanus's wife, not his mother.

It is unclear whether Caius Martius (or Marcius in some versions of the story) was a historical figure or merely a legendary one. In any case, his taking of Corioli is supposed to have occurred early in the fifth century BC, some 15 to 20 years after the Romans overthrew and banished the last of their kings, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, around 510 BC. In the play, Cominius describes how the young Caius Martius met Superbus face to face on the battlefield during the former king's final attempt to regain power.

At the time the play takes place, Rome was a republic, with two consuls as heads of state and with responsibility for government divided up among various assemblies constituted along class lines. The upper classes, or patricians (from the Roman word for "father"), controlled the Senate, the army and the legal system, as well as the supply of grain. The common people, or plebeians could elect two (later five) tribunes to represent them in the Senate. The aediles, who are also mentioned in the play, were special attendants on the tribunes who enforced their orders.

The Roman republic lasted until 27 BC, when it was replaced by the empire under Octavius Caesar (Augustus).

CORIOLANUS IN PERFORMANCE

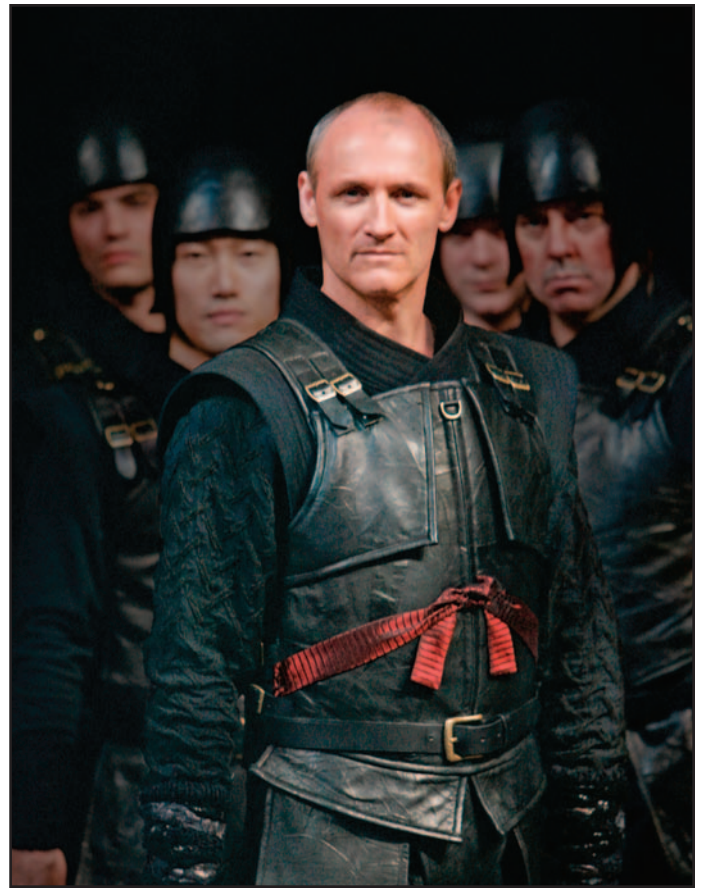
There are no records of performances of *Coriolanus* in Shakespeare's lifetime, though an apparent echo of some lines from the play in *The Italian Tylor and His Boy*, a tract published in 1609 by Robert Armin, an actor in Shakespeare's company, suggests that it had been performed at least once before then.

The first recorded performance is of an adaptation by Nahum Tate, presented in 1681 under the title *The Ingratitude of a Common-Wealth: or, The Fall of Caius Martius Coriolanus*. Another adaptation, *The Invader of His Country or the Fatal Resentment*, by John Dennis, was produced in 1719.

It wasn't until the 19th century that the original Shakespearean text was again presented on the English stage, perhaps most notably by William Charles Macready, who produced the play at Covent Garden in 1838. Other famous 19th-century actors who played Coriolanus include Henry Irving, Edmund Kean and John Philip Kemble (uncle of Fanny Kemble, subject of the one-woman show by Peter Hinton that is being presented at the Festival this season).

The first North American production of *Coriolanus* (in a version that combined Shakespeare's play with another play on the same subject by James Thomson) was presented in Philadelphia in 1767, with David Douglass in the title role.

The 19th century's most notable American interpreter of the role was Edwin Forrest, who first played it in 1831.



Colin Firth as Coriolanus with members of the company.

Memorable productions in the 20th century included a politically motivated adaptation, by René Louis Pichaud, with a strong revolutionary message. It caused near-riots in the streets of Paris when it was presented by the Comédie-Française in 1934.

There have been several television productions of *Coriolanus*, including one made by the BBC in 1984 that featured Alan Howard in the title role with Stratford alumna Irene Worth as Volumnia.

STRATFORD FESTIVAL PRODUCTION HISTORY

This is the fourth production of *Coriolanus* at the Stratford Festival and the third to be presented at the Festival Theatre.

1961 (Festival Theatre): Directed by Michael Langham, with Douglas Campbell as Menenius Agrippa, John Colicos as Aufidius, Pat Galloway as Valeria, Michael Learned as Virgilia, Paul Scofield as Coriolanus and Eleanor Stuart as Volumnia. Designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch. Music by Louis Applebaum.

1981 (Festival Theatre): Directed by Brian Bedford, with Len Cariou as Coriolanus, Barbara Chilcott as Volumnia, Lewis Gordon as Menenius Agrippa, Lynne Griffin as Virgilia and Scott Hylands as Aufidius. Designed by Desmond Heeley. Music by Gabriel Charpentier.

1997 (Tom Patterson Theatre): Directed by Richard Rose, with Rod Beattie as Junius Brutus, James Blendick as Menenius Agrippa, Dan R. Chameroy as a Lieutenant, Martha Henry as Volumnia, Tom McCamus as Coriolanus, Lucy Peacock as Valeria, Jeffrey Renn as Aufidius and Jennifer Wigmore as Virgilia. Set design by Patrick Clark; costume design by Yvonne Sauriol. Music by Don Horsburgh.



PAUL SCOFIELD (above as Coriolanus) is making his first North American appearance at the Stratford Festival. One of the top actors in England he has played many roles at Stratford-upon-Avon including Henry in *Henry V*, Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, Hamlet, and Don Adriano de Armado in *Love's Labour's Lost*, his other part here at Stratford. West End successes have included *Ring Round the Moon*, the Priest in *The Power and the Glory*, and the lead in *Espresso Bongo*, a musical. Mr. Scofield recently concluded a long London run as Sir Thomas More in *A Man For All Seasons*, a part he will repeat on Broadway after the close of the Festival season.

CORIOLANUS

ABOUT CORIOLANUS

Synopsis of the Plot

OVERVIEW

Coriolanus is a political drama in which a Roman military hero's bid for public office turns to tragedy after his enemies make use of his fatal inability to relate to the common people. Believed to have been written sometime during the winter of 1607 and the spring of 1608, it was first published in the First Folio of 1623, compiled after Shakespeare's death by his fellow actors John Heminge and Henry Condell. The Folio text is considered the only authoritative one.

SYNOPSIS

For his valour in all but single-handedly winning the city of Corioli from the Volscians, led by Tullus Aufidius, Roman General Caius Martius is given the name of Coriolanus. The Roman upper classes, the patricians, also want to make him a consul – the highest office in the Roman republic.

Their choice is bitterly opposed, however, by the representatives of the common people, the tribunes Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus, who take advantage of Coriolanus's evident contempt for the concerns of ordinary citizens to stir up resentment against him. So well do they succeed that the enraged mob denounces Coriolanus as a traitor and he is banished from the city.

Joining forces with his former enemy, Tullus Aufidius, and hardening his heart against the entreaties even of his staunchest friends and supporters in Rome, Coriolanus prepares to attack his former homeland, much to the alarm of its people. At last, his mother, Volumnia, accompanied by his wife and young son, goes to the Volscian camp to sue for peace.

Moved by her pleas, Coriolanus agrees to a treaty, whereupon Aufidius, who has come to distrust his new ally, declares Coriolanus a traitor and kills him.



Colm Feore as Coriolanus.

ABOUT CORIOLANUS

Cast of Characters

ROMANS: Patricians

CAIUS MARTIUS, *later CORIOLANUS*

VOLUMNIA, *his mother*

VIRGILIA, *his wife*

YOUNG MARTIUS, *his son*

MENENIUS AGRIPPA, *his friend*

VALERIA, *a noble lady*

COMINIUS, *Consul and Commander-in-Chief of the Army*

TITUS LARTIUS, *a general*

SENATORS

NOBLES

ROMANS: Plebeians

SICINIUS VELUTUS, *Tribune of the people*

JUNIUS BRUTUS, *Tribune of the people*

CITIZENS

AEDILES

SOLDIERS

OTHER ROMANS

GENTLEWOMAN *to Volumnia*

NICANOR, *a traitor to Rome*

OFFICERS

HERALD

MESENTERS

USHER, DRUMMER, TRUMPETER, SCOUT, CAPTAINS, LICTORS, ATTENDANTS

VOLSCES

TULLUS AUFIDIUS, *general of the Volsce army*

LIEUTENANT *to Aufidius*

ADRIAN, *a spy*

GUARDS

CITIZENS

SOLDIERS

LORDS

SENATORS

CONSPIRATORS

ATTENDANTS

Suggested Topics for Discussion

1. Have your students read *Coriolanus*: discuss what they expect to see on the stage when they attend the performance of *Coriolanus* at the Stratford Festival.

Have each student make a list of predictions about what they expect. Save these predictions. After seeing the show, revisit them to see how they compared to the actual production.

2. Have your students make a story map or a story board outlining the main events of the play. (This may be used later in group activities.)

3. *Coriolanus* has appealed to artists and audiences around the world for 400 years. What do your students think the play's message is? What parts did they respond to most? Were there parts they wished were different? How?

4. Have your students create a character web showing how all the characters are connected to each other. Discuss the complexity of these relationships and how they affect the progression of the play.

ABOUT CORIOLANUS

Cast List – 2006 Stratford Festival Production

ROMANS: Patricians

CAIUS MARTIUS, *later CORIOLANUS*..... COLM FEORE
VOLUMNIA, *his mother*..... MARTHA HENRY
VIRGILIA, *his wife*..... NICOLÁ CORREIA-DAMUDE
YOUNG MARTIUS, *his son*..... CAMERON SPROTT
MENENIUS AGRIPPA, *his friend*..... PAUL SOLES
VALERIA, *a noble lady*..... KEIRA LOUGHRAN
COMINIUS, *Consul and Commander-in-Chief of the Army*STEPHEN RUSSELL
TITUS LARTIUS, *a general* ROY LEWIS

SENATORS..... JEAN-LOUIS ROUX, GARY REINEKE, IAN DEAKIN, DAVID FRANCIS,
STEPHEN GARTNER, BARRIE WOOD

NOBLES SANJAY TALWAR, JEFFREY WETSCH

ROMANS: Plebeians

SICINIUS VELUTUS* DON CARRIER
JUNIUS BRUTUS* BERNARD HOPKINS

**Tribunes of the people*

OTHER ROMANS

GENTLEWOMAN *to Volumnia*MARY ELLEN MAHONEY
OFFICERS JULIAN DOUCET
HERALD GARETH POTTER
MESSENGERSBRIAN HAMMAN, GARETH POTTER

VOLSCES

TULLUS AUFIDIUS, *general of the Volsce army*.....GRAHAM ABBEY
LIEUTENANT *to Aufidius*..... SANJAY TALWAR
LORDS..... GARY REINEKE, DAVID FRANCIS
SENATORS..... DAVID FRANCIS, GARY REINEKE
CONSPIRATORS STEPHEN GARTNER, GARETH POTTER, BRAD RUDY

CITIZENS, SOLDIERS, AEDILES, ATTENDANTS, GUARDS SEAN BAEK, WAYNE BEST,
RYAN BOYKO, JON de LEON, AIDAN deSALAIZ, IAN DEAKIN, JULIAN DOUCET, DAVID FRANCIS, STEPHEN
GARTNER, ADRIENNE GOULD, ROBERT KING, BRIAN HAMMAN, MARY ELLEN MAHONEY, SHAUN McCOMB,
GARETH POTTER, STEPHEN ROBERTS, BRAD RUDY, SANJAY TALWAR, HARRY THOMAS, NICOLAS VAN BUREK,
JEFFREY WETSCH, BARRIE WOOD.

ABOUT CORIOLANUS

Production Choices

PERIOD AND SETTING

The events of *Coriolanus* are supposed to have occurred early in the fifth century BC. The principal locale is ancient Rome, with other scenes taking place outside the gates of Corioli (also called Corioles), a city that no longer exists but that is believed to have been near what is now Velletri, and in the ancient seaport of Antium (now Anzio).

The design of this production is suggestive of that ancient world, but with elements of modernity. Costumes are in bright jewel tones. The play is presented on the basic stage of the Festival Theatre, without elaborate set pieces.

SELECTED ARTISTIC PERSONNEL

Coriolanus is directed by **Antoni Cimolino**, now in his 19th season at the Stratford Festival, of which he was recently named General Director. Mr. Cimolino's previous directing credits at the Festival include *As You Like It*, *King John*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Night of the Iguana* and *Filumena*. He was co-director of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and assistant director on numerous other productions. He also directed *Filumena* and *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* for radio at CBC's Glenn Gould Studio, *A Woman of No Importance* at Wayne State University's Hilberry Theatre in Detroit and *Twelfth Night* at Detroit's Attic Theatre, which garnered him two Best Director Awards from the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*. His acting credits at the Festival include *Romeo*, *Laertes*, *Claudio*, *Flute* and the *Dauphin*. He holds an honorary doctor of humanities degree from the University of Windsor.

The title role is played by **Colm Feore**, who spent 13 seasons at the Festival in such roles as *Hamlet*, *Romeo*, *Iago*, *Richard III*, *Petruchio* and *Benedick* before embarking on a successful film and television career. He returned for the Festival's 50th-season celebrations in 2002, playing Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady*. His stage appearances elsewhere include *Cassius* in the Broadway production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, starring Denzel Washington, and *Claudius* in *Hamlet*, also in New York. On television, he has played the title role in the mini-series *Trudeau*, for which he won the 2002 Monte Carlo Television Festival Award for Best Actor and the 2002 Gemini Award for Best Actor in a Mini-Series; *Julius Caesar* in ABC's six-part mini-series *Empire*; and a mad advertising executive in the acclaimed Canadian mini-series *Slings and Arrows II*. He has also appeared in *The West Wing*, *Boston Public*, *Benjamin Franklin*, *Napoleon*, *Nuremberg*, *The Day Reagan Was Shot* and *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself*. Film credits include *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, *Lies My Mother Told Me*, *The Chronicles of Riddick*, *Chicago*, *Paycheck*, *The Sum of All Fears*, *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, *City of Angels*, *Face/Off* and *The Insider* with Russell Crowe. This season, Mr. Feore also plays *Fagin* in *Oliver!* and the title role in *Don Juan*.

Volumnia is played by **Martha Henry**, now in her 32nd season at the Festival. Ms Henry has been associated with the Festival since 1962, when she first appeared as *Lady Macduff* in *Macbeth* and *Miranda* in *The Tempest*. Since then she has appeared in over 40 productions and directed six, including *Richard II*, *Richard III* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. During the winter of 2005-06 she directed *Homechild*, a new play by Joan MacLeod, for Canadian Stage in Toronto, joined Ken Finkleman to play *Lucy* in his new six-part series *At the Hotel* and travelled to Montreal for the Masque Awards, where she was nominated for her performance in Martin Sherman's one-woman play *Rose*, at the Saidye Bronfman Theatre. Ms Henry is a recipient of the Governor General's Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Performing Arts, a member of the Order of Ontario and a Companion of the Order of Canada. This season, she also plays *Mrs. Helena Alving* in *Ghosts*.

The cast also includes **Graham Abbey** as *Tullus Aufidius*, **Don Carrier** as *Sicinius Velutus*, **Nicolá Correia-Damude** as *Virgilia*, **Bernard Hopkins** as *Junius Brutus*, **Roy Lewis** as *Titus Lartius*, **Kiera Loughran** as *Valeria*, **Jean-Louis Roux** as *First Roman Senator*, **Stephen Russell** as *Cominius* and **Paul Soles** as *Menenius Agrippa*.

Music for the production is composed by **Steven Page**, co-founder of the Canadian pop group *Barenaked Ladies*. Mr. Page and his colleagues wrote the music for last season's production of *As You Like It*, also directed by Mr. Cimolino.



Martha Henry as Volumnia.

CORIOLANUS

Honour and Humanity

Antoni Cimolino, General Director of the Stratford Festival, is directing this season's production of Coriolanus. Here he discusses issues arising from the play with Pat Quigley, Director of Education and Archives



What attracted you to Coriolanus? Why did you want to direct it?

I'm really drawn to those plays of Shakespeare that are written at moments when he obviously didn't see a lot of hope. Such plays as *King John* and *Coriolanus*: they're very spare, they're clearheaded, they're merciless, they're bleak, there's no hope. And yet they contain so much humanity. Shakespeare rips apart all of those ideals that we have about life and gets us down to essential humanity.

Can you give me a specific example of the humanity in Coriolanus?

When you look at the whole of his journey, you realize that the man learns too late that there has to be some forgiveness for not measuring up, that there has to be tolerance for others' shortcomings. He also realizes, too late, that he can't be an author of himself. He looks at his wife, his son and his mother, and sees them very clearly. He sees the state of humanity very clearly in that second-last scene. And then in the very last scene his voice changes, and because he has been purged of the hatred, he realizes now that he's part of everybody. You can hear it

in his voice when he talks to the Volscians. That voice of moderation, of acceptance, denotes a different man. He becomes a different man at the end of the play. And then he's killed.

There is no hope in humanity?

If it's true that the point of our journey on earth is to get to know ourselves a little bit better, then one man has achieved that, although it costs him his life.

Coriolanus isn't just about Rome, is it? Can you relate the politics in the play to Shakespeare's own life?

I don't think Shakespeare was interested in history. I think he was interested in his own times and used history as an excuse to write about them. Unfortunately, we can't get inside Shakespeare's mind, so it is difficult to say how he experienced the events of his day and how they affected him. Politically, though, hell is other people – and Shakespeare puts a lot of other people in the play. The mob is made up of difficult individuals who change their minds. They'll agree to go one way, and then they'll go in an entirely different direction. So that's one

point in the play: people are messy and they all have individual agendas that have to be taken into account. The second point is that people can lose their common sense and their ability to be rational and become very ugly when they begin to act as a group, as a crowd. The third thing is that, just as we want to be catered to and flattered as individuals, we tend to act the same way as a community. So we, the people, have a tendency not to make the wisest decisions in a democracy. Democracy may be the best system in the world, but it's not flawless. I think Shakespeare wanted to investigate that.

It seems to me that someone like Coriolanus would be doomed no matter what kind of political environment he found himself in, because he doesn't know how to play politics.

It depends on what you think the role of a leader within a democratic society is. We no longer expect to be asked to make sacrifices for our country; we'd rather just have a tax break. Coriolanus is talking about communal action all the way through the play, and he's leading by example, and I'm not sure what more a leader can do. He's doing the right thing. But there are things

that leaders have to do that he doesn't. He doesn't articulate his cause clearly; he doesn't enable the Romans to understand that his cause is their cause. They think that the rich only want them to fight this war to take their minds off other issues. Rome has people who are hungry and need corn. They see the war as a cynical political play that is used by the rich to coerce them to go out and fight at a time when there are bigger tensions.

That's been the question about war from the beginning of time, I suppose. Is the cause honest and worth sacrificing yourself for?

Shakespeare is very clear about the war in this particular situation. Rome is not the aggressor; Rome is being invaded, so it's pretty clear that in the limited world that we're looking at in this play, Coriolanus's cause is just. Of course, that doesn't mean that the nobles are just, and it doesn't mean that they aren't using the war just as the poor people are saying.

Shakespeare doesn't provide answers or take sides?

We're left thinking about what the role of the nobility is, what the role of the ordinary people is. The actions of the poor reveal that they don't believe in the justness of the war – but the enemy is still coming to cut their throats. That's one question. The other questions for the poor people are "What benefit do I get from the war?" and "Why am I starving to death?" and "Can we find another way of conducting our affairs so we don't get into fights?" There are a lot of right questions. There seems to be a willingness to compromise on the part of the patricians, which Coriolanus doesn't share. What do we make of that? Are the patricians really wise old men who know what's reasonable? At one point Coriolanus wants to stop the people from having a vote. The patricians, the rich people, don't want to do that. Is this because they are older and wiser, or do they have an agenda that differs from what Coriolanus wants? Do they seek to maintain the status quo because it increases their wealth, and will they sell out Coriolanus as well as the poor people when they need to?

"We can't trust any politician to tell us the truth" seems like a very contemporary statement.

The very first question that comes up in the play is, "Is there corn?" That's a really important question, and we don't know the

answer to it. I'll bet there *is* corn. I bet there's tons of corn. And the patricians are hoarding it, because they know the price will go up. I don't believe that Coriolanus is worried about whether there is corn or not. The more important question for him is, "What have the people done to *deserve* corn?" And I think that's a really important question. I think it's probably more important than whether there is corn or not. His point is that, if you give corn for free, people will begin to realize that they don't have to do anything for it – for example, fight in the war against the invaders – and eventually everyone will die. So his question is bigger, more idealistic, truer.

Well, it's more idealistic.

No, it's the right question to be asking. I'm not saying that the poor people *shouldn't* get corn. I'm just saying Coriolanus's question is more philosophically true. Everybody else is a pragmatist in this play. He's not. He's asking enduring questions. But in the end, politics wins. The world of Coriolanus is a very cynical, hard world. So Shakespeare is reaffirming the futility of our existence, the laziness of man, how the rich want to get richer and how the poor don't really have any answers and are no better than the rich, who just have more money in their bank accounts.

Shakespeare also shows us a family with great personal failures. Coriolanus's mother passes on a harsh military ethos that he adopts completely and seems to be passing on to his son.

According to Plutarch, at that time in Rome there was a very narrow conception of what virtue was: it simply had to do with honour gained in the battlefield. And, in fact, Rome was always at war. However, the world that Shakespeare shows us is not quite the world that legend or myth would have us believe. Part of that myth was this idea of valiantness, this ideal of the warrior. I think Shakespeare is saying that didn't actually exist. People were simply trying to lead their lives in comfort. So in this world the successful person is Menenius, who comes in and stops the mob from taking the grain by force by telling them the fable of the belly. What works in this society is politics in the sense of lying to people, of telling them what they want to hear, of misrepresenting the truth. But Coriolanus's mother has taught him that the only definition of virtue is valiantness, just as Plutarch said. He grows up adhering to a code that really



Design sketch of
Caius Martius
Coriolanus by
Santo Loquasto

belongs to legend. He grows up being very hard on himself.

And the ideals passed on to him by his mother don't exist?

She's a liar because she doesn't adhere to that code herself when she tries to persuade him to become a politician and deceive people. Coriolanus finds out that his mother is a liar; in fact, he finds out that all those around him, except for his wife and son, are liars.

As a disillusioned idealist who is not a liar, who is definitely not lazy, does not Coriolanus also fail in his personal relationships: his relationship with his mother, his relationship with his wife, his relationship with his son?

Yes, he realizes that at the end. He has had no time for his wife; he has had no time for his son. In fact, when he is first expelled from Rome, he determines that he's going to come back and kill everybody, including his wife and his son, because he has been wronged. There are clues in the final scene with his family that he has had certain realizations. I believe that when Volumnia



Design sketch of
Tullus Aufidius
by Santo Loquasto

tells Coriolanus's son to kneel to him, the son doesn't obey. When Coriolanus says, "That's my brave son," he's approving of the fact that his son doesn't kneel. At the end of the scene, when his son finally does kneel, he then realizes that the son is a person who has a right to live. Coriolanus has come to understand that there is human failing, and he views that frailty differently. Shakespeare does this in *King John* as well: he takes such words as *honour* and trashes them at the beginning, and we watch the clever people who laugh at honour take over the world. And then we watch their behaviour, and we realize there *is* such a thing as honour, Maybe it's not grandiose, maybe it just happens once in a while between people, but it's worth a great deal. In *Coriolanus* a man finally gets to the point where he realizes that his whole life has been lived along a series of lies, and he realizes too that we're all just frail human beings.

Does he find then a sense of honour and integrity in acknowledging how he has failed in his relationships and in his social and political life as well?

I think so, because the voice he uses in talking to the Volscians at the end is totally different from the voice we have heard him use earlier. My sense is that he's now talking reasonably, not in the extreme way he has in the past. He knows that his decision not to attack Rome will cost him his life; he says that very clearly to his mother. What he did originally was take the hatred that he felt and redirect it back at those people who hated him. He was going to burn Rome. What he does now instead is redirect the fire to himself, and he stops the cycle himself. And that's all we can do: not pass on the cycle of hatred and try to stop it.

How would you describe his relationship with Aufidius, the man who kills him? Even though they are mortal enemies, he and Aufidius seem to share a bond that he doesn't achieve with other people.

I think he misreads what Aufidius is about. At the beginning of the play Coriolanus refers to Aufidius as a lion that he loves to hunt. At the end he calls him dog, as he realizes at the end of the play that this was no lion, there was no nobility here. He was a jackal, a creature that would eat the remains of something that somebody else had killed. Coriolanus thinks that Aufidius is like him – but he's wrong, as he finds out, and his mistake costs him his life. Aufidius is a survivor; Coriolanus is suicidal. Once Coriolanus gets going, there is a part of him that will not stop telling the truth, even if it means his death. That's not true of Aufidius. Aufidius above all seeks to survive.

In Coriolanus a man finally gets to the point where he realizes that his whole life has been lived along a series of lies, and he realizes too that we're all just frail human beings.

I think what Coriolanus sees in Aufidius is a man of honour. He mistakenly thinks that somehow there is someone else out there who will fight for something he believes is true. He thinks that Aufidius is a kindred spirit. And he finds out too late that he's wrong about that.

Aufidius, however, sees Coriolanus pretty clearly. Though he wants Coriolanus dead, Aufidius has good things to say about him that seem to come from some good place in him.

I suspect there is something that rings true in what he has to say about Coriolanus' nobility. He was too noble to live. Yet Aufidius gains by saying that. He needs to say it, because he may have gone too far by killing this enemy who has stolen all his men's hearts. He first of all pretends to be angry in order to kill Coriolanus, and then, perhaps, he pretends to admire Coriolanus. My sense is that it's hard to discern the truth because of what's politically gained. It's hard to decide, as it is in life, where the truth ends and where the lie begins.

I'm still not certain that I understand fully the attraction between them.

Coriolanus runs away from home; he runs away from his mother and from everybody around him. It's very easy to see this as the mother who was not feeding the child. There are so many lines about them spitting things out, about feeding and hunger. There's a sense of his having been malnourished. His mother is Rome, a marble-breasted tyrant. Coriolanus goes to this other man, Aufidius, for sustenance. He goes to this other man to see a mirror image, to find someone like himself and to get away from the viciousness of women and the lies and the entrapment of women. So the women become vampiric, and the other male becomes the nurturer. But right away his perception is shaken, as Aufidius has to ask seven times, "Who are you?" I think Coriolanus is shocked that he's not recognized, because he thought they were so much alike. They both for a moment embrace each other and think that they have a common cause. They plot the destruction of Rome, but very shortly Aufidius realizes that his interest is not the same as Coriolanus's interest. He realizes that he's losing the loyalty of his men, that he's losing his place in his own country, in his own society, and that he has to kill Coriolanus.

It's interesting that there is no nurturing in the play, and that's part of what makes it so bleak. There is no feminine; there's nothing that feeds you on that level at all.

There is the butterfly representing the human spirit.

But the son eats the butterfly.

That's right. We become butterflies, we become delicate, beautiful creatures. The butterfly is a symbol of change, of the delicacy and beauty of humanity. Remember the descriptions of Coriolanus as a child that come out of Volumnia's mouth at the beginning of the play, the descriptions of how beautiful he was. He sounds nothing like a Neanderthal warrior. He sounds like a discerning, intelligent, promising, beautiful boy. He sounds like a poet, not like a thug. But something in the training ensures that the butterfly never develops. The son has to eat the butterfly; he has to stop the change into something that is delicate and beautiful.

So when the son eats the butterfly, that's another bleak moment. The son isn't going to become a butterfly either.

Shakespeare doesn't close with that image. It's not good that the son eats the butterfly, but I think there is hope at the end that the child may not become what his father was.

Because the father has changed?

And the mother too. Virgilia, Coriolanus's wife, is a very interesting and purposely underwritten character. She doesn't agree with Volumnia, and she's the only person who can stand up to Volumnia. When her friend relates the story of the butterfly, she says something that minimizes the damage. She says he's a crack, he's a just a piece off the statue; whereas the grandmother goes on about how he's just like his father. Virgilia is always worried about Coriolanus's health when the rest of them are bragging about how many wounds he has received. She's worried about him as a person. I think she has nobility that is a match for Coriolanus. I think they have a true marriage by the end. But this is an unusual character: a great hero who lives with his mother. Mom is the great ugly shadow on the household.

This is an unusual character: a great hero who lives with his mother. Mom is the great ugly shadow on the household.

Which represents, metaphorically anyway, that ethos that to die in your shield is better than to survive. It's almost as though Volumnia takes on epic proportions in that regard.

She's trying to survive, and she's certainly a woman who is full of energy and power. Since she doesn't have a husband, her son is her only way to become something in Rome. But she can't be accused of ultimately believing in what she taught; she doesn't. As much as we can try to be apologist for Volumnia, on some level she has committed a crime, and I think her crime is much greater than anything that Coriolanus ever does.

Is that a crime that we are still committing today with youth? Is that what we still try to do with adolescents? We pass on an ideal and applaud them when they adopt it even in rigid terms, and yet we're not at all like the ideal ourselves. When they discover that, the disillusionment is huge.

It depends on the degree of lying that comes from the parent. The parents of suicide bombers receive financial benefit when their kid dies. If the mother is encouraging the child, and some of these are children, to die for their country because they believe in it, that's one thing. If they don't believe in it themselves, and Volumnia does not ultimately believe in this, that's a different thing altogether.

Although both are repugnant on some level, because in both cases children are sacrificed by virtue of what they've been taught. It's almost as if free will for Coriolanus comes too late when he can remove the blinders.

Maybe I'm being a bit hard on Volumnia. She has a very fluid sense of how to achieve an ultimate end. Coriolanus's mistake was that he believed what she was saying was that honour and truth and honesty are always right. But she's more of a trickster. She says if you do this in battle – if, in battle, you pretend something if it means you don't sacrifice men – why don't you do it in peace? There are a lot of problems about certain behaviours that are excusable on the battlefield but not excusable in peace. And then the question becomes “How do you define peace?” Maybe we are always in a state of war, and so you can wiretap people's phones. The answers are ambiguous, profoundly ambiguous. Shakespeare constantly challenges our judgment in his plays. The appealing, interesting, wonderful person, like Menenius, at the beginning, turns out to be kind of pathetic and misguided and self-serving at the end. That's why he really makes Coriolanus unattractive at the beginning, to make it so we understand Coriolanus at the end.

So we can all find empathy and forgiveness, because there is no such thing as a perfect human being?

One of the nobles says at the end of the play, after having not acted, “Let's make the best of it.” Maybe that's the moral of this story: “Let's make the best of it.”



ABOUT CORIOLANUS

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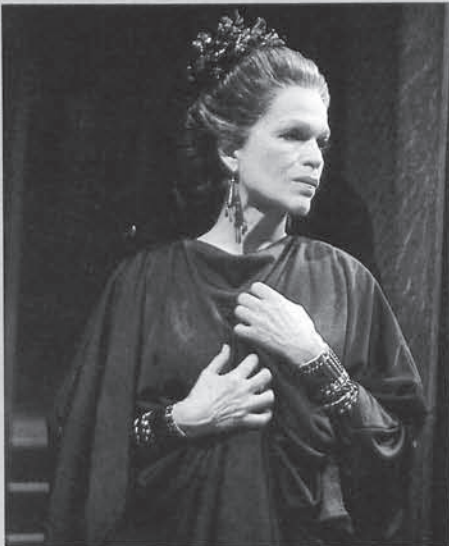
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Coriolanus: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

by Alexander Leggatt

Coriolanus is a startling play. We know - or think we know - what to expect from Shakespeare: fine lyric poetry, humane and sympathetic insights into character, a sense of the wonder and magic of life. And yet, if there is one constant factor in Shakespeare's art it is his capacity to surprise. This story of a Roman general in conflict



Barbara Chilcott as Volumnia.

with his city may well have been his last tragedy, and if so it shows that he was experimenting to the end, presenting fresh challenges to his audience and to himself. Instead of the "Shakespearean" qualities we have come to expect, we have a merciless analysis of man the political animal, a verse stripped of lyricism (but with a harsh, clashing music of its

own) and above all a hero who seems to go out of his way to be not just unsympathetic but inhuman.

This may be the most vivid study of confrontation politics ever written, and over the centuries it must have struck a chill of recognition into anyone who has seen an organization - whether a nation or a committee - tear itself apart. Each side identifies the common good with its own interests (does that sound familiar?) and while the plebeians' cry "The people are the city!" is more nakedly obvious than anything the patricians say, this may be because the ruling class takes the identification of the state with itself as a matter of course. Shakespeare knows these people inside out, and he gives each group its own eloquence - so much so that in our time the play has been embraced by Fascists and Marxists alike as a statement of their own interests. But Shakespeare does not take sides. That is not his way. For one thing, he is finally after something deeper than politics. When the plebeians are speaking as individuals, not as a mob, they can be shrewd and level-headed. There are moments, indeed, when the nameless citizens seem to talk the best sense in the play. Off guard, the ruling class can be quite attractive: witty, urbane, capable of deep friendship and affection. Shakespeare observes as sharply as any modern satirist the violence and absurdity of the political arena; but this does not lead him to despair of humanity. This may be a clue to the ultimate puzzle of the play, the hero himself.

Coriolanus thrives on conflict. He is stubborn and unreasonable, asking his hard-pressed fellow soldiers, "Are you lords o' the field? / If not, why cease you till you are so?" He is crazy enough to take on an entire city single-handed. Yet in the simplified world of the battlefield these are the qualities that make him a hero. He dares more, and endures more, than any reasonable man would; and that extra



edge of the unreasonable gives him victories no ordinary man could achieve. He is the stuff of military legend. But when the war hero comes home his presence in the community is an uncomfortable one - as history has shown us more than once. Coriolanus brings to domestic politics the mentality of the battlefield. He will not compromise; he will not be reasonable; when a meeting breaks up in disorder, he simply cries, "Stand fast! / We have as many friends as enemies." He has no patience



with the routines of politics; the problems he likes are the ones that can be settled with a sword.

It finally appears that his true allegiance is not to his city or even his class but to himself. Cast out by the one, betrayed (as he sees it) by the other, he determines to destroy his city - friend and enemy alike - in an act of private revenge. In the process he tries to deny his common humanity: he sees himself first as a "lonely dragon" and then as a thing with no name, no identity:

*He was a kind of nothing,
titleless,
Till he had forg'd a name o'
the fire
Of burning Rome.*

Other Shakespearean tragic heroes imperil their humanity; Coriolanus sets out, with cool deliberation, to destroy his. He almost succeeds.

It is at this point that the play moves suddenly to a deeper level. It has been a spectacular piece, full of action, conflict and sheer noise; the trumpets of battle, the organized shouts of the mob. For its climactic scene it moves to the domestic scale, and while we are still in a military camp, our attention is centred on two figures, Coriolanus and his mother - the first of human relationships. Coriolanus, the man who could never compromise because he could

never lie, is made to confront his final question: is the attempt to deny his common humanity the biggest lie of all? After all the noise, Shakespeare does something that for him is unusual: he asks that the final decision be made in a long moment of silence. In that silence Coriolanus, who looked at first so unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, confronts the question they all have to face. It is Lear's question: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

Coriolanus is as tough and unsentimental a play as Shakespeare ever wrote, and its last scene has a brutal inevitability: the hero must not only make his decision but face its consequences. Yet inside Coriolanus, wartime hero and peacetime monster, Shakespeare can find a human being after all. That he does so without compromising the rest of his portrait, without casting the faintest shadow on the clear honesty of the play's vision, is the final achievement of this remarkable work.



Len Cariou as Coriolanus, Lynne Griffin as Virgilia.

Photos: Robert C. Ragsdale